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AUTHOR Cockriel, Irvin W.
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ABSTRACT

The participation of University of Missouri-Columbia faculty as advisers to student organizations was investigated in 1986. A total of 47 faculty who served as advisers in 1983-1984 but who were no longer serving in this capacity completed an open-ended survey. Findings indicated: 11 of the 47 cited no reward or a conflict with promotion as the reason they chose not to continue as an adviser to a student organization; seven of the faculty who had served as advisers had retired; seven noted that their department had a policy of changing (rotating) advisers; six were in fact still advising with a different student organization; six said the student organization had dissolved; and five said there had been a reorganization and their assignment had changed. It is concluded that the pressure to publish and conduct research has become so much a part of the tenure and promotion policies that faculty are forced to give up working with student organizations. (SW)

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Who Will Advise Student Organizations?

Abstract

A study of faculty advisors to student organizations and why they no longer serve as advisors to extracurricular activities. The pressure to publish and conduct research has become so much a part of the tenure and promotion policies that faculty are forced to give up working with student organizations.

A paper presented at the
NASPA IV-East IV-West Conference
November 1987

by
Irvin W. Cockriel
Associate Professor of Higher Education
University of Missouri-Columbia

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Who Will Advise Student Organizations?

Extra-class activities and student organizations began to function in colleges and universities in the middle of the eighteenth century, and were literary and debate societies according to a history of student organizations by Frederick Rudolph (1962). He goes on to trace the development of fraternities and sororities and uncover the first student organizations at the turn of the century. According to Marine's (1984) account, by the 1920's there was a great proliferation of student activities on most campuses. This great expansion caused many colleges to re-consider the value of student participation. Suddenly, the educational value of students participating in campus activities was recognized. With this came faculty assistance. Faculty assistance was generally considered as a guidance function and not one of control. Rudolph (1962) and Berman (1978) assert that the student development emphasis is based on the concept that student activities personnel are educators.

According to Marine (1984), the concept and function of advising student organizations became a mature process following World War II. It was clear by then that faculty members would advise specific groups, expecially those considered academic in nature. Research and philosophy supported the concept that student participaiton in an out of class organization could meet valuable developmental needs of students. There was a concept that faculty adivsors could facilitate desirable student learning and outcomes.

The emphasis on student development helped define the facutly advisors role as an educator, since the values and goals were tied to the mission of the department or college.

Fenske (1983) traces the changing role of faculty involvement in student services and describes very aptly events leading to these changes. The Association of College Unions-Internaitonal created a task force to study student activities and that report (Shindell, 1981) also discusses the trends in faculty involvement with student activities. This evolution of task and function is still occurring in American colleges and universities.

Oppossing Forces

Beginning in about 1980, there have been greater pressures to "publish or perish" as never before. A study reported by Bowen and Schuster (1986), confirmed the intense pressure to publish and conduct research at the expense of "other" faculty functions. Instituions that have for years been identified as the "publish or perish" type of institution were experiencing an even greater push. Most surprising is the number of four year or liberal arts colleges that are requiring faculty to engage in publications and research, where historically they were evaluated on excellent teaching and service.

Pressure to publish and conduct research was greater in 1986-87 than any previous time in American higher education (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Schully, 1986.) According to the 1986 Carneigie Foundation Advancement

of Teaching Report (Boyer, 1986) one only has to look at the tenure and promotion policies to discover what professor activity is being rewarded. The reward structure simply does not embrace any efforts to work with students, including advising student organizations. There is a great fear that teaching has even dropped from the reward structure (Schully, 1986). Alexander Astin (1987) argues that most institutions adhere to the "publish or perish" syndrome which relegates teaching, advising and service to second-class status.

So where does this leave us with faculty advising of student organizations? It has been documented (Scully, 1986) that faculty members are torn between the competing expectations and desire for promotion, those research and publications or working with students. Ironically, we have more and more evidence that faculty members who interact frequently with students outside the classroom provide for significant growth and development for the students. In a very scholary treatise, Astin (1984) discusses research and theory that supports that highly involved students, including faculty contact through extracurricular activities, has significant positive effect on their total development. Research has consistently shown that extra-curricular activities can have a major impact on college student in many different ways: emotionally, socially, physically, mentaly, etc. (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Chickering, 1974; Astin, 1977; Bowen, 1977; Hood, 1984; Kuh, 1985). Recent retention research has also pointed out the positive impact of extra-curricular activities in preventing students from dropping out throught intergration into the campus

community (Tinto, 1987; Toy, 1986; Cowart, 1987; Webb, 1987). Jack Reese, Director of Assessment Services for the American College Testing Program reported (1987) that faculty who care about students, are good academic advisors, and get involved with students outside of the classroom (including extra-curricular activities) make a significant difference in the retention of students. The importance of interaction between students and faculty members outside of the classroom has also been documented, for example by Pascarella and Terenzini (1977). These studies all point out the importance of faculty participation in the development and retention of students.

In collaboration with the Student Development Office at the University of Missouri-Columbia, advisors (1986-87) for student organizations were studied and that report (Cockriel, 1987) indicates a very high turn over rate among the current advisors to student organizations. Over 58 percent of the advisors have served less than three years. Many organizations cease to exist for lack of faculty who are willing to serve. What causes this high turn over rate? We know some of the attitudes of the current advisors to student organizations, but we have no knowledge of the attitudes of those who once served.

Due to the high turn over rate peaking at 3 years, it seemed logical to select advisors to student organizations 4 years ago. This study focused on identifying advisors for the 1983-1984 academic year and to isolate those who are no longer advising.

The Office of Student Development has maintained a paper folder on all organizations since 1950. These records were not recorded on any computer data base, so every folder had to be searched manually to locate active student organizations in 1983-1984 and then specific information concerning the advisor was noted.

This research identified 130 advisors from 1983-1984 who were no longer advising an organization in 1986-1987. Even in 1983-1984 some advisors served more than one organization so the number of unique advisors was 121. Of the 121 unique advisors only 69 were listed in the faculty directory for the 1986-1987 academic year. A check was also made in the Student Development folders to locate advisors who might still be on campus. The 69 persons identified as advisors in 1983-1984 who were still on campus but not currently serving as advisors to any student organization became the subjects for this study.

An opened ended survey was sent to the 69 subjects as follows: "Please indicate why you no longer choose to serve as an advisor to a student organization. Include situations causing you to withdraw from this service beyond your control."

Within four weeks the responses totaled 47, for a 68% rate of return. All the responses were forced into unique catagories and talled. This resulted in 9 different catagories and they are presented below in frequency order.

11 A. Not rewarded for working with student organizations - workload - conflicts.

7 B. Practice to change (rotate) advisors within department.

7 C. Retired from UMC - Now teaching elsewhere.

6 D. Records in error - still advising, but different organization.

6 E. Organization dissolved.

5 F. Reoganization - sponsorship went with assignment, and assignment changed.

2 G. Have not been asked.

2 H. Went on leave, when returned someone else was advising.

1 I. Was replaced by boss.

47

Eleven, or twenty-three percent cited no reward or conflict with promotion as the reason they chose not to contune to serve as an advisor to a student organization. Tied for the next most frequent reason, seven, was the reporting that they were now retired. If those seven had been identified as retired earlier, then the eleven who cited no reward or conflict with promotion would represent twenty-eight percent of the responses.

While this is a dramatic statistic, it does confirm the suppositions by Bowen and Schuster (1986), that the pressure to publish and conduct research is forcing all other faculty activities to cease. This also seems to be in agreement with Baldwin and Krotseng (1985) as they discuss the trends in the 80's that threaten the morale and performance of professors. They look at the factors and conditions that affect

faculty vitality and maintain that all colleges and universities do employ some incentives to stimulate what they consider important. These findings also are consistent with data from current faculty now serving as an advisor for a student organization on the same campus (Cockriel, 1987).

These findings when considered with the survey results of active advisors to student organizations and apparent national trends, raise some intriguing questions. Unless some intervention or change occurs with the current pressure to publish and conduct research with no recognition or incentives to work with student organizations, then one can safely predict more faculty having less and less to do with students. For faculty to work actively with students in various types of extracurricular activities they will need to consider what it could do to their career. For untenured faculty, it would be disasterous for them to consider to actively serve as an advisor to a student organization.

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